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ABSTRACT

This research examines how peer facilitators in an experiential learning model of communication in introductory speech communication courses offered at the University College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, Canada, are able to meet the specific learning needs of male and female students simultaneously. Also examined is the perceived role of these facilitators within the model. Data in the report are based on focus group interviews with peer facilitators and literature on experiential learning and Cape Breton cultures. The report details facilitators' attempts to establish authority, rapport and an informal educational environment in ways that do not increase power distances or affect the relationship between facilitators and students. Facilitators are shown to be positive in their support for the model and in their role as facilitators. Further research is suggested to improve facilitator training under the model and to examine facilitation teaching techniques. Contains 12 references. An appendix presents the Focus Group Interview Guide. (Author/RS)

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The Role of the Peer Facilitator in the Experiential Learning Model of Communication

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Abstract

This research examines how peer facilitators in an experiential learning model of communication offered at the University College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, Canada are able to meet the specific learning needs of male and female students simultaneously. Also examined is the perceived role of these facilitators within the model. Data in the report is based on focus group interviews with peer facilitators and literature on the experiential learning and Cape Breton cultures. The report details facilitator's attempts to establish authority, rapport and informal educational environment in ways that do not increase power distances or affect the relationship between facilitators and students. Facilitators are shown to be positive in their support for the model and in their role as facilitators. Further research is suggested to improve facilitator training under the model and to examine facilitation teaching techniques.

The Role of the Peer Facilitator in the Experiential Learning Model of Communication

Introduction

Experiential learning, widely embraced as a pedagogical tool in introductory Communication courses, is a process whereby students are introduced to communication theories and then are expected to apply those theories to their own experiences and the experiences of those around them through informal experimentation and observation. Experiential learning provides a personal, self-directed approach to education and makes abstract communication theories more tangible to the student and develops students' critical thinking skills. As students apply theories they also evaluate them so that theories are not just accepted on the author's authority alone thus increasing the retention of material. This research is an extension of Rolls (1997) and attempts to explain how peer facilitators meet the specific educational needs of male and female students in the experiential learning model offered at the University College of Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Literature Review

Cape Breton Island is an important tourist destination in Atlantic Canada and the scenic beauty is widely promoted with tour operators and promoters (Sulliman MacPherson and Corbin, p. 237). Cape Bretoners' possess a distinct identity and Celtic influence permeates the culture, music and language. Sulliman MacPherson and Corbin (1996) note strong connections to local cultures, heritages, and even individual families supersede commitment to the nation within the Cape Breton psyche (p. 239). In response to a struggling economy, Nova Scotia has a firm commitment to higher education with 13

universities and colleges, 11 internationally recognized, and a 13 campus community college system. The University College of Cape Breton is located in Sydney, Nova Scotia, with a population of 125,000 (Choose Nova Scotia, 1999-2000 winter, p. 20-21).

Most American college students expect exposure to basic speech communication courses like public speaking but the same is not true of Canadian students as communication is often interpreted to mean some form of media of journalism study in Canadian universities (Rolls, 1998). When American style speech communication courses are found they are often obscured within other departments such as Drama or English. With over thirty courses available from nine full-time and several part-time professors, the University College of Cape Breton is a leader in undergraduate speech communication study in Canada (Rolls, p. 295, 1998). More importantly it has been at the forefront of experiential education practice since the department's inception in 1976.

The UCCB Experiential Learning Model

At the University College of Cape Breton (UCCB), students, as part of their introductory Interpersonal and Public Communication courses are expected to attend a weekly communication laboratory in addition to their three hours of class time. These sessions or labs, count for 20 percent of a student's final course grade and consist of groups of five to seven students, under the guidance of a peer facilitator engage in learning exercises that are in some cases videotaped for subsequent evaluation and discussion. These exercises in some cases allow practice for upcoming in class performances and compliment course theory. The lab also requires three written student journals to allow students to reflect on their cognitive, affective and behavioural development. Videotaped in class presentations

are viewed in the lab with a facilitator available to guide the student in critiquing his or her work. The facilitators are directly supervised by a full time co-ordinator in the lab that has state of the art audio-visual equipment and serves more than four hundred students per semester.

Peer facilitators are senior Communication students who have been chosen for their high level of maturity, leadership qualities, communication skill and academic standing. Facilitators meet each week to review a lesson plan with their co-ordinator and execute a lesson plan, which usually consists of a discussion and exercise, with a lab session of 5-7 students. Facilitators are not lecturers or professors but rather guides that initiate discussion, address student concerns, provide feedback on in lab exercises, and offer encouragement and support. Facilitators occasionally field questions from students on classroom material but only serve to clarify that which has been presented by the professor.

Research on the UCCB Experiential Learning Model. Communication Education scholar Judith Rolls (1993; 1996; 1997; 1998; 1998, July) has chronicled the growth of the UCCB experiential learning model. Rolls (1993) first attempted to explain the UCCB model and gauged student responses to the model via written assessments of the lab and through comments made about the lab in written journals leading her to conclude that students benefit from experiential learning. Rolls (1997) then sought to determine whether there were gender differences in the way that students responded to the UCCB model. The research again used lab assessment guides that identified respondents only as male or female. Although, well served by the UCCB experiential learning model, the research found that males and females have different educational needs. While females emphasized relational elements of the lab (i.e.-encouragement and support, the need to get along with the

facilitator), males emphasized operational aspects (i.e.-the lab was relevant, the facilitator was competent). The study also found that regardless of facilitator gender, male and female students had their educational needs met. The research concludes that facilitators, regardless of their gender, are able to meet the needs of both male and female students.

Rolls (1998, July) effectively applied the experiential leaning model developed at UCCB to implement communication skills training within the culturally unique, working class environment of Cape Breton. Experiential learning appealed to workers because of low power distances between student and facilitator and the rich personal anecdotes used by trainers to bring theory to life. The interactive nature of experiential learning appeals to the down-to-earth Cape Breton nature, as Rolls (1998, July, p. 17) notes, "Once the trainer sets the scene, Cape Breton participants are willing to participate, offer humour, and provide honest, often soul searching self disclosure." Rolls notes that the facilitator's personality is key in student involvement.

Rationale

What behaviours do peer facilitators engage in that make them effective? There is little information in the literature that addresses the facilitator characteristics. This research seeks to extend Rolls' research by examining the role of the experiential learning facilitator; to determine the types of behaviours they demonstrate that enable them to meet the needs of both female and male basic course students.

Little is known about how peer facilitators view their role in this model. Gaining an understanding of the pedagogical processes and behaviours that promote gender-sensitivity represents an important step in understanding how to facilitate experiential

learning that works. Such knowledge could help with the selection and training of peer facilitators in the future. To discover what makes for an effective experiential learning facilitator, this research probes facilitators themselves to extract what they feel makes them effective and able to meet the needs of a variety of students. This research also recognizes that facilitators are a key element in the UCCB model and as such need be given voice into aspects of the model that might need to be emphasized in future facilitator training. Giving voice to facilitators creates a clearer representation of the model employed in Cape Breton by presenting actual scenarios and outcomes of this model. It is hoped that hearing and organizing facilitators' experiences will expand the model's knowledge base.

Method

This research extends the Rolls (1997) study and uses the focus group as a basis to explore the peer facilitator perspective in the UCCB model. The focus group while originally used in evaluating mass media messages, marketing and public relations research is cited by Lederman (1990) as valuable for investigating educational effectiveness. The group process allows individuals to collaborate and create a depth of response that would not necessarily come from the individual and assumes that people are more willing to contribute in a group where they have support in others who had the same experiences. Yet Ledingham and Bruning (1998) caution of the potential of these same group processes to create a "groupthink" situation where individuals concur with one another to not contradict the group opinion.

A focus group works best when directed towards answering specific questions or problems as this keeps the group on track and avoids producing useless information. An experienced moderator notes Ledingham and Bruning (1998) draws out shy participants and keeps outspoken ones politely in check. The moderator conducting the focus groups in this instance has vast hands on experience within the model. Many of the skills developed within this context are easily amended to the focus group interview. I acknowledge the possibility for such a moderator to hinder the group process as over familiarity with experiential and the facilitation process might cause him/her or the participants familiar with them to not explore issues in significant depth because they seem to be self-explanatory. To avoid this I adopt an outsider perspective, wording group questions in a way that demands elaboration and making use of follow up questions that request illustration (**see Appendix A**).

Also important is to limit the number of participants to six to ten people (Katcher, 1997; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998) to avoid an unfocused and unmanageable group. The number of participants is not the main concern in focus group research but rather the depth of the data produced as Lederman (1990, p. 124) notes, "They are not a summary of percentages or the basis for inferential statistics." Focus group research produced qualitative capta and the value of this is that it allows for the in depth exploration of behaviours, speech acts and unique contexts such as that provided by facilitators within the model employed at UCCB that statistical data cannot provide.

The research questions sought to identify facilitator behaviours that fostered a nurturing and gender-sensitive environment and to gain the facilitator perspective on their role within the experiential learning model. The questions are as follows:

RQ1: What behaviours do peer facilitators engage in that allow them to meet the needs of male/female students?
RQ2: How do peer facilitators perceive their role in the UCCB EL model?

The two interview sessions were audio taped and involved nine of a staff of fifteen peer facilitators. All facilitators were enrolled at UCCB where many were majoring or concentrating in Communication. There were three males and seven females; a good representation of male facilitators as there were only three male facilitators employed this year and all participants were white, as there were no facilitators of visible minority status working in the Communication Lab this current year while there have been previous to this research and since. The facilitators involved ranged in experience from facilitating two labs in one year to a dozen labs over a number of years and ranged in ages from early twenties to late forties with most ages around the early twenties. Participation was voluntary and the interviewer was familiar with all of the participants.

Analysis

Interviews were transcribed as no efforts were made to 'clean up' the speech of participants that often contained repetition, pauses, vocalizations and false starts. These transcripts were then broken down into meaning statements. Meaning statements either directly referred to behaviours used to effectively and inclusively facilitate or statements on the definition and role of facilitators and facilitation as it fits into the experiential learning model in place at UCCB. These meaning statements were further organized according to common themes. In response to research question one, five themes were discovered. For research question two, participants' comments concerned defining the role of facilitator and the role of facilitation and its place within the UCCB model. These themes, identified using

participant's own words, will henceforth be expanded upon for their implications upon the questions.

Results: RQ1

Respondent's statements in response to questions addressing RQ1 clustered around into five predominant themes. The themes are identified not by labels arbitrarily assigned by the researcher but with an individual's statement that best demonstrates the idea expressed in the theme. Themes are expanded upon to incorporate the responses of other interviewees. Statements which are meaningful but do not fit the framework of themes and do not occur frequently enough to be themes are discussed for their significance at the end of this section.

Themes

I teach lab I teach in a very unauthoritarian kind of laid back kind of way **(Duncan-group 1).** Statements in this theme spoke of an environment that was informal and relaxed reflected in the style of facilitation used. Facilitation was less concerned with formal structure and more aware of encouraging participation of all individual students involved. Achieving this unstructured environment is discussed as a process that evolves as the facilitator becomes more experienced and thus more comfortable in the role of facilitator. Subjects spoke of achieving this informal unstructured style by using their student's comments and observations to define concepts or experiences for the group and by not following the order of tasks on the sheet given by the lab co-ordinator preferring to let the dialogue between student and facilitator determine the order of the lab tasks.

That's one comment I get year after year and that's that I'm really personable and I'm just like a friend **(Mairi--group 1).** The peer facilitator is just that, a peer often of a

similar age to his/her students but also one placed in a guidance role. Not surprisingly this is a difficult seemingly contradictory relationship to negotiate and a number of statements relay this. Often, facilitators report that they can be treated like friends by their students but also that they can be falsely seen as someone not to take seriously or who can be taken advantage of easily. Often it is not until the student pushes the boundaries of appropriate behaviour and facilitator intervention is required does the facilitator role become most clear to the student; although there are not great power differences in the student-facilitator relationship there are nuanced differences, such as sitting at the head of the table, that need be respected. As the facilitators reported that conflicts were the exception rather than the rule, many students come away thinking of the facilitator as an experienced approachable friend.

You can't be authoritarian but you have to have an air of authority, you have to have that certain I call it Je ne sais quoi I don't know what it is but you either have it or you don't or you create it and you learn you learn to have it and you do; its all in your attitude **(Innes--group1).** There are not strong power differences between student and facilitator as such that could be found between professor and student thus it was repeatedly suggested that authority and credibility must be subtle to maintain student confidence in the lab but cannot be established to harshly as to turn students off. Practical hands-on knowledge, personal foibles and embarrassing mistakes were valuable sources of authority as the facilitator cannot claim a graduate degree as a credential. Facilitators also spoke of strategic seating patterns and familiarity with material as behaviours used to imply their authority in the lab. When students challenge that authority gentle reproachments are meted out often in private so as not to encourage similar behaviour in

other students. Facilitators spoke of the authority needed for lab as something you possessed immediately or something that one developed over time. Facilitators cited an overemphasis on facilitator abilities and merit a barrier to accomplishing authority. As Rolls (1998, July, p. 17) notes, "Down-to-earth Cape Bretoners expect the same in return and are quick to put people in their place."

Humour is always a really good ah tool to use uh to keep the atmosphere comfortable and entertaining and allows the process to move on **(Maria--group 2).** Humour helps facilitators accomplish a comfortable and safe environment for students. This can be attributed to humour not being used to teach students to laugh at their fears and embarrassing situations that may or may not occur in communication situations. The facilitator accomplishes this by using self as model and sharing humorously unpoised communication experiences. The humour is relevant because it references similar situations that the students face. The humour also allows for the creation of a relationship because it is based in the sharing of personal information. The humour serves a dual purpose it is relevant to what is being discussed but it is also relationship building as it demonstrates a sharing of self with others, a facilitating through example.

Building that rapport in any group that you're working with is building trust and establishing a genuinely interesting relationship shows that you are generally interested in that individual and I think that that is the glue that binds a group **(Maria--group 2).** Statements in this theme expressed the need to have a rapport or relationship with some degree of mutual trust or affinity between the facilitator and the student. Facilitation as a result is concerned with drawing students into a dialogue in which they share of themselves as part of the learning process. Informal talk in a conversational mode with an obscured task

orientation is most commonly discussed as the means of achieving this rapport. It is a rapport with a purpose of knowing the student better the implication being that if the facilitator knows the student better this personal knowledge will provide for a starting point from which to facilitate the learning process in lab. This rapport is especially important to develop with the shy student for the rapport building conversation is felt to make this type of student be made to feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. Rapport building conversation has a strong relational element but also is task oriented as it uses information gained through observation as a means of accomplishing leaning goals and introducing task relevance.

Conflict and Dominance

It was difficult to arrive at a consistent theme from statements in this area. Many facilitators did not believe that they encountered conflict or domineering students and therefore did not comment on the subject or tried to answer hypothetically with no basis in experience. Of those who were able to respond, episodes varied widely and in some cases participants were reluctant to label them as belonging to this category. Varied also were the responses to and perceptions of this type of behaviour. A participant responded:

> *being domineering is not a negative thing, sometimes even acknowledging that as the person being enthusiastic and exuberant and ah encouraging a team spirit that ah "Okay we've got all this energy here, lets get some more from..." and asking by name the particular individual* (Maria--group 2)

Another participant saw dominance as requiring immediate correction:

> *I've generally been able to handle those fairly fine and either straighten them up or have them not come back for lack of a better term because in a lot of those cases not only did they negatively affect me but they made everyone else feel uncomfortable which is definitely what you don't need here* (Duncan--group 1)

It is difficult to say anything conclusive about this subject because of the diverse approaches taken and the fact that only experienced facilitators (approximately half the group) commented. Gender did seem to affect perception of dominance and conflict as male respondents deem the behaviour negative and as warranting of an immediate response while females framed the behaviour positively and employed indirect correction strategies if any. Future research would be wise to probe facilitator responses to conflict and dominance as an analysis of such episodes might determine the role of factors such as gender, age and experience in affecting the remediation strategy chosen.

Results: RQ2

Here facilitators were questioned about how they perceived their role within the UCCB model. It was difficult to arrive at consistent themes in the responses to this question. Responses were collaborative and contradictory and facilitators responded with anecdote and experience often offering suggestions on how the model should be amended. Observations on the process of facilitation are offered first, followed by negotiations of the role of facilitator.

Facilitation

Interview participants had interesting insights into the role of facilitation in the experiential learning model used at their university. Some participants felt that the lab and classroom environments were vastly different and that the classroom needed to take a cue from the lab facilitation process and amend its structure accordingly:

> *you should be able to pass across the same information and still have the same type of a system as in the lab and you could still put to practice here but they also put to practice in the class if they were more comfortable if there was more rapport I guess was maybe established I guess there are a number of other ways that I guess the classroom could be changed* **(Tina--group 2)**

The facilitators were enthusiastic and positive about facilitation and it's benefits. Other participants expressed that there was already little difference between the classroom and the lab at UCCB and any difference was purely stylistic. Contrasting the styles of professors was used to illustrate this point. This is not implausible as some researchers conceptualize experiential learning as a function of the classroom or even as a substitute for the classroom experience (Katula and Threnhauser, 1999).

Respondents that the lab and the classroom were different and the function and structure of each required that this difference exist. The two determining factors in this evaluation were individual attention and power differences. At the time of research Communication classes at UCCB were limited to approximately 25 yet it was felt that increasing classroom sizes prohibited the individual attention that one receives in lab but also heightens the power distance between student and teacher. Having some power difference between professor and student was seen as implicit within educational structure:

> *facilitating which I think would be the most at least for me the best way of learning because it's a co learning, co sharing and you co construct the environment and the material ...a classroom setting it is structured hierarchically and I don't know if that could change because a teacher may have 75 students its unlikely that she can go and ask for equal input around the classroom* **(Maria--group 2)**

This respondent, and those who spoke similarly were referring specifically to class lecture format. Some felt this type of interaction was if not a necessary part of an educational model then at least one that was not likely to change.

So while all participants agree that difference exists between lab and classroom, be it style or substance, they do not unanimously agree that the two should continue to be separate even if this could mean eliminating the role of facilitator. All did agree that facilitation was positive and provided the most fertile environment for learning. It is interesting to note that when it was suggested that facilitation be brought into the classroom the aspect of rapport and close interpersonal interaction between teacher and student was of utmost importance. They view student success as resultant of having a teacher or facilitator who has a personal stake in his/her student's success.

Facilitators

The facilitator in the UCCB experiential learning model does distinguish the role of the facilitator from the role of teacher although their language might not reflect this. Often the descriptor "teacher" is used because it is more widely known and understood term than "facilitator" outside of the lab environment. Although the term "teacher" is used they distinguish themselves from the professor by noting that they have a peer relationship with their students that would probably not exist within a professor student relationship as a graduate education creates a power differential. Terms like "teacher" and "teaching" are used to communicate with family and friends outside of the lab who would not fully understand what a "facilitator" was so easier to understand terms are used but these descriptions are easily qualified, when the individual is pressed, to reflect the role of peer facilitator.

Definitions of facilitator were as diverse as the lived experience represented in the groups. Two participants described the facilitator as the person responsible for building a student's self esteem thus ensuring their success while one noted that facilitators

highlight the potential and ability of the individual. One description described the facilitator as a sounding board who helps the student to form critical ideas and use their knowledge to gauge their success:

> *A facilitator not so much teaches as an instructor but throws out ideas and lets the students elaborate on those ideas and just acts sort to like a guideline that the students can lean on so they can take all their ideas and fit them into the theory that they are learning in the classroom* **(Norma--group 2)**

Facilitators do refer to themselves as teachers yet most consent that this is true in a general sense as they give information or lead students as they seek knowledge. The terms "guide", "guideline" and "guidance" were used consistently by a number of participants in describing the facilitator's role. The American Heritage Concise Dictionary (1994, p. 372) defines a guide as "One who shows the way by leading directing or advising." Perhaps "communication lab guide" could perhaps be an effective descriptor for the facilitator role.

Important to mention in participant responses is that attention to the individual student as a person is never lost:

> *we're also there to be considerate of the individual and there sense of who they are and where they're going so when we look at constructive feedback sometimes that entails positive stroking* **(Maria--group 2)**

"Positive stroking" follows earlier mentioned comments focusing on developing student self esteem and support for the individual. It speaks to an element that runs through participant responses though it may not be as succinctly expressed and in some cases it is implied but it is a placing of the individual student at the forefront of all efforts not to be displaced by personal knowledge or reputation or by the importance of the process itself. Facilitators when asked about their role in the experiential leaning model provide unanimous support for its positive impact on students.

Discussion

The close and informal environment of the lab privileges interaction over task order allowing the dialogue to become a gateway of introduction for the content of the lab. This provides an alternative to the traditional classroom environment as facilitators place the impetus on the students to direct their learning. Facilitators serve to guide and students and are careful not to recreate the lecture mode of the traditional university classroom. Here authority is implied rather than stated so as to encourage a rapport between students. This fosters a decreased power distance between student and facilitator that creates the perception of facilitator as friend and makes for a meaningful and trusting relationship between student and facilitator. Facilitators attend to the emotional needs of students providing encouragement, support and bolstering self-esteem.

Facilitators possess a great capacity for sharing personal experiences and anecdotes with their students. Sharing in this way helps build rapport with students by demonstrating affiliation through shared anxieties and communication blunders. In this way sharing serves a relational function but it also serves an operational function by providing personally experienced do's and don'ts that students can learn from. Humour serves a similar purpose it is relevant to what is being discussed but it is also relationship building as it demonstrates a sharing of self with others.

Even the act of small talk that takes place at the beginning of lab sessions was shown to serve a dual purpose. Such conversation obviously has a relational aspect of rapport building but also is has an operational orientation. Facilitators report that information gained from such conversation provides insight into student anxieties and areas where students need improvement. Also, such talk is directed to show how the content, often about

everyday life, was relevant to communication issues being studied. Facilitators use information gained through observation of and participation in informal conversation as a means of better focusing leaning goals and introducing the relevance of tasks.

Facilitators are positive about facilitation and the communication lab experience and feel that it is an environment that is most conducive to student learning in communication because it is a safe and supportive environment made relevant to the student's learning goals. Some facilitators felt that the environment of the lab be extended to the classroom but others agreed that the model be maintained as is. This suggests a need to continually reinvestigate the structure and implementation of this model to insure that students are best served.

Facilitators also demonstrated that they are positive about their roles as facilitators and they have a clear sense of what the role of facilitator entails. It was a concern of those in the department that perhaps the facilitator role overlapped with that of classroom professor because many facilitators describe themselves as teachers but this research has shown this not to be the case. Facilitators see themselves as guides who initiate dialogue about communication topics under investigation. The language they use is to achieve a better understanding of what they do with those who may be unfamiliar with the term "facilitator." Quite the opposite as facilitators do not wish to be associated with the role of professor which they feel is too removed from their students to achieve the type of close rapport to which they have become accustomed.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research

Rolls (1997) in gauging students' satisfaction with the lab experience on the basis of gender found that both males and females felt positively towards the lab experience but for different reasons. Male students tended to focus on the operational aspects of the lab when indicating their satisfaction with the lab (i.e.--the usefulness of the lab, whether the facilitator was knowledgeable) whereas female students emphasised the relational factors when indicating their satisfaction (i.e.--whether the facilitator was likeable, whether there was a good rapport) (Rolls, 1997, p. 56). It was found that facilitators, regardless of sex, were able to meet the experiential learning needs of both male and female students (Rolls, 1997, p. 56).

From the results of this research it is clear that facilitators are able to meet the needs of both male and female students because they give equal weight to both the operational and relational factors in their facilitating. Based on their self-reports, facilitators equally emphasised both relational factors as well as operational factors. Both factors seemed to continually intertwine. For instance, conversation was used to both build a rapport but also to get students thinking about their own communication and to apply the theories to their own lives. Facilitators would disclose personal experiences from their own lives to instruct students but it also served to strengthen the relationship between facilitator and student. Also, facilitators had to demonstrate credibility and authority but in subtle ways that would not impinge on the peer relationship between facilitator and student. Facilitators are able to meet the needs of both male and female students as Rolls (1997) concluded because they blend the relational and operational aspects of facilitating.

This research, coupled with Rolls (1997) could, presented in another format, be used in to train new facilitators to ensure that students' needs continue to be met. New focus groups could be constructed with the purpose of giving advice to new facilitators. With this in mind future research could organize facilitator's suggestions on improvements they feel needs to be made to training. These materials could make for an effective training schedule and ensure the continued success of the model.

Future research would be wise to probe facilitator responses to conflict and dominance as a typology of such episodes might be helpful in determining the role of factors such as gender, age and experience in affecting the remediation strategy chosen. As this research demonstrates, many facilitators do not have a great amount of experience dealing with conflict. Perhaps this is due to the nurturing environment that has the effect of diffusing adversarial relationships between student and facilitator and possible conflict situations. It could also be that facilitators choose for their own comfort not to define certain behaviors as disruptive while the impact of the behavior on the lab might be negative and thus need to be addressed. This research would be helpful in making any needed changes to facilitator training in regards to conflict.

Participating facilitators stressed the effectiveness of using humorous anecdotes and stories borrowed from personal lived experience in teaching students. It would be significant to do research on the use of personal narrative and anecdote in facilitation to gain a better understanding of how they function and in what contexts they function most effectively. This research suggests that narratives of personal success in communication serve to help the facilitator establish themselves as authorities in their subject areas subtly without speaking down to their students. This research identifies the importance of

establishing authority as long as it is done in subtle ways and personal narrative seems to satisfy this requirement. Self-deprecating narratives were also discussed as accessible sources of humour as well as a way of diffusing student anxieties. Future research could identify the most popular narrative forms used and their beneficial uses within the experiential learning model currently used at UCCB.

Note: I would like to thank the peer facilitators who shared their time with me for this research. Additionally, I would like to thank Warren M. Alley and Dr. Judith Rolls for their continued support and encouragement.

Appendix A
Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction

Interviewer introduces self and asks interviewees to do same being careful to mention the number of labs they have facilitated over how many years. Interviewer provides background and rules as follows.

Briefing

There is no hidden agenda to this discussion. I will be asking questions to get a full picture of your thoughts and feelings and I ask that you feel free to express these openly. There are no right or wrong answers, only your honest opinions. I ask that you only speak one at a time and regard this tape recorder as an extension of my memory. Everything you say is confidential and the results of this discussion will be reported anonymously. Does anyone have any questions on how we are going to proceed?

Questions

1. The first issue is to discuss your experiences as peer facilitators.
   A. Could you each recount a positive as well as a negative experience for me that you have experienced as facilitators?
   B. Describe your initial experience as a facilitator?
   C. Discuss with examples your experience thus far?
2. Research determines that you are effective in meeting the needs of both male and female students.
   A. What do you do to make the lab an enjoyable and informative experience for students?
   B. How do you deal with domineering/problem students as well as shy/uninvolved students?
   C. How do you deal with conflict in the lab? Discuss why you deal with it well/not so well?
3. Another issue I would like to explore is how you think you fit into the Communication Department at UCCB.
   A. Explain how you define the role of facilitator for yourself?
   B. How would you describe your style of facilitation and why?
   C. Is there anything about your experience that you would like to include or that I have not questioned you about?

Conclusion

I would like to thank you all for coming here today to speak to me. I will now answer any questions you have about the research in which you are participating.

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